

# A Letter from the Editorial Team

## Perspectives on Identity and Fluidity

Wu Yuxin Stella

We are delighted to present the second issue of *HKU Art History Student Journal (HKUAH)*. This is the first issue where we have an open call for papers with overarching keywords. The keywords of the journal for this academic year are “identity” and “fluidity.” Artistic practices often involve direct or indirect processes of constructing, negotiating, and reconsidering multi-layered identities at individual, societal, or national levels. Recent scholarly discussions have deconstructed identity as being secured, monolithic, and stable, instead probing fluid, hybrid, and intersectional perspectives of identity with terms such as individualization, pluralization, or globalization.<sup>1</sup> In art history, this trend has evoked a re-examination of the fluidity of identities projected in art objects across geographical boundaries and time spans.

The articles in this issue foster dynamic discourses on art, identity, and fluidity. By analyzing works of art in diverse socio-temporal contexts, these writings present how identities merge in self-images, social attributions or roles, performances, or archival-constructed narratives. In the Exhibition Review section, Chen Youxi reviews the exhibition *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970–1990* at Tate Modern, highlighting the exhibition’s “non-restrictive” narrative discourses on feminist art. In the research article section, Tam So Yin Dilys takes a cross-disciplinary approach to investigate how statistical theories of estimation and iteration can be applied to comprehend archival narratives in art. Li Chuqi Catherine examines how the photographer Tseng Kwong Chi asserts a complex Asian-American identity that rebuts flat labeling

through his photographs, while Kwok Yan Yi Emily discusses how Tokyo-based Japanese artist Mako Idemitsu’s video artwork dissects the social phenomenon of the housewife in the Japanese context. Through a comparative analysis of *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) and *Almerisa Series* (1994–2008), Tam explores how performance art elicits emotional responses from viewers and demonstrates the inextricability of duration and affect. Closing our issue is Max Chan’s commentary on Anita Mui’s cover album art, presenting how Mui transgresses feminine and masculine stereoscopes, and how her art reflects the identities of Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s.

As these articles show, identities are intricate constructs that encompass multiple dimensions of identity, including gender, ethnicity, race, social class, and more. These identities are not fixed or definitively established; instead, with openness and ambiguity, they allow for subjective articulations from different positions in art.<sup>2</sup> However, the fluidity of identities always exists in relation to, rather than in opposition to, the more concrete aspects of our environment. These backdrops, relatively constant yet still precarious and contingent, locate identities in place and interact with the fluid processes of their formation and development.

To our readers, we hope you enjoy reading our latest issue.

---

1 For instance, Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim examine the concept of individualization and the interplay between individual agency, social structures, and the construction of personal identities. Amelia Jones probes the contingency and productive mutability of artistic identification, while Arjun Appadurai investigates the cultural dimensions of globalization and its impact on identity formation. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012); Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 2012); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

2 Chantal Mouffe, “Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?” trans. Paul Holdengraber, *Social Text*, no. 21 (1989): 31–45, 35.

**Bibliography**

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Beck, Ulrich, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012.
- Jones, Amelia. *Seeing differently: A history and theory of identification and the Visual Arts*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Mouffe, Chantal. "Radical Democracy: Modern or Postmodern?" Translated by Paul Holdengraber. *Social Text*, no. 21 (1989): 31–45.